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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 003919

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SUBJECT: LY ELECTION REGIONAL OVERVIEW

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Classified By: AIT Director David J. Keegan, Reason 1.4 (B/D)

1. (C) Summary: The projected shift in the balance of power between the Pan-Green and Pan-Blue camps in the Legislative Yuan (LY) reflects changing electoral dynamics within Taiwan's five main regions. In the north the two sides will likely split the vote as they did in the last LY elections held in 2001. The Hakka districts and central Taiwan, in comparison, are where the Pan-Green is poised to make the biggest gains and where the contest is being played out most fiercely. The south continues to be dark Green and the Pan-Green will have difficulty further whittling down the already meager Pan-Blue presence. The smaller east coast districts, outlying islands, and the aborigine vote continue under Pan-Blue domination, although the Pan-Green could make some minor inroads. End Summary.

Pan-Green Seeking to Capitalize on Presidential Gains

2. (C) Having made large gains in traditionally Pan-Blue strongholds during the presidential election earlier this year, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) hopes to parlay that support into a majority in the LY. Although most analysts place the Pan-Green about three seats shy of a majority, the Green is likely to deprive the Pan-Blue of its current majority (See Reftel for an overview of the island-wide numbers). The Pan-Green has run a well orchestrated campaign. Although it could be hurt by overnominations in the north, it is likely to hold its commanding lead in the south and erode most of the Pan-Blue advantage in the Hakka districts and central Taiwan, where it picked up 40 and 50 percent, respectively, of the popular vote in the presidential election this year. In comparison, the Pan-Blue has nominated conservatively, but is suffering from organizational challenges and renegade candidates that will siphon off traditionally Blue votes.

Northern Taiwan: Splitting the Big Prize

3. (C) With a total of 48 seats in Taipei County (28 seats, one more than the last election) and Taipei City (20 seats), northern Taiwan has been a site of fierce fighting. The north, nevertheless, appears likely to repeat the 2001 split between the Pan-Blue and Pan-Green, going 24-23 in the Blue's favor with one independent. In Taipei County (but not city) the Pan-Blue parties have shown remarkable restraint in coordinating their nominations, resulting in a strong slate of candidates. The Pan-Green, by contrast, has nominated aggressively in all northern districts, hoping to get closer to their goal of a majority. With successful vote distribution in Taipei County, the Pan-Green might be able to take an extra seat, but it seems more likely that the unusually disciplined Pan-Blue will win an additional seat or two, shifting the balance in the county from its current 14-13 favoring the Pan-Green to a 14-14 split or even 13-15. Equally under pressure in Taipei City, the Pan-Green will be struggling to preserve its 9 seats while the Pan-Blue is likely to win 10 seats and may pick up one more at the DPP's expense, with the last seat going to a Blue-leaning independent.

The Hakka Districts: DPP Eating Away at Blue Advantage

4. (C) Heavily populated by the ethnic Hakka minority, the counties of Taoyuan (13 seats), Hsinchu (3 seats), and Miaoli (4 seats) and the city of Hsinchu (3 seats) hold a total of 23 seats and have been the focus of the DPP administration's efforts to expand beyond its ethnic Taiwanese base. The DPP's campaign to recruit more Hakka grass-roots support and promote Hakka cultural events yielded marked gains in the presidential election this year and will likely translate into more legislative seats on December 11. In Taoyuan County the DPP is poised to gain one seat at the expense of the People First Party (PFP), which will lose one or two seats, reducing the current 8-5 Pan-Blue advantage to 7-6. In Hsinchu and Miaoli Counties the DPP has a good chance of improving upon its previous performance, reversing the 2-1 Pan-Blue lead in Hsinchu to 1-2 and reducing the 3-1 Pan-Blue advantage to a 2-2 draw. Hsinchu City remains the only area

where the status quo, 2-1 in favor of the Blue, will remain intact.

Central Taiwan: Battleground to Produce a Draw

15. (C) Central Taiwan, with a total of 39 seats (one more than the last election), is where the previous 20-15 Pan-Blue advantage, with 3 independents, is most likely to be reduced to a slim 18-17 Pan-Blue margin with 4 independents. The DPP will be seeking to duplicate its success in the presidential election, when it boosted its support in these districts, and will depend on the effectiveness of its vote allocation system. The Kuomintang (KMT) will need its grassroots organizations to remain a force in voter mobilization to fight off the challenge. In Taichung City (8 seats, one more than the last election) the Pan-Green has 3 safe seats versus 4 seats for the Pan-Blue, with the remaining seat likely to go to a Green-leaning independent, making for an effective 4-4 split. In Taichung County (11 seats) the DPP recently decided to "forsake" (chi-pao) one of its candidates and increased its chances of drawing a 5-5 split with the Pan-Blue, a reduction from the current 6-4 Pan-Blue advantage, with one independent getting the remaining seat.

16. (C) In Changhua (10 seats) and Nantou (4 seats) Counties, the Pan-Green has nominated several incumbents and added strong moderates in the hopes of taking an extra seat. The KMT, by comparison, has overnominated, and the presence of ex-KMT mavericks threatens to undermine its position. Nevertheless, the most likely outcome for both counties appears to be a repeat of the status quo from 2001: a 5-4 Pan-Blue advantage in Changhua with 1 independent and a 2-2 draw in Nantou. Yunlin County (6 seats), where vote-buying and criminal gangs reign supreme, is the hardest county to predict, but will likely go 3-2 in the Pan-Green's favor with one independent, a reversal of the current 3-2 Pan-Blue advantage.

Southern Taiwan: Pan-Green Reached Saturation Point?

17. (C) Most analysts see little prospect for major changes in the south, where seven counties and cities combine for a total 46 seats (one less than the last election). The DPP made significant gains in its traditional stronghold three years ago, and is basically looking to hold ground. Analysts estimate the Pan-Green could drop one seat, but the Pan-Blue can lose two seats, with one seat moving out of the region and another two going to independents. This would actually raise the Green margin of victory over the Blue from 11 seats (28-17 with two independents three years ago) to 12 seats (27-15 this year with four independent). The Pan-Green is likely to pick up seats in Kaohsiung County, where the unexpectedly high vote total of then-DPP newcomer Lin Tai-hua led to the defeat of two other DPP candidates. This time, the DPP is working to spread the Green votes more evenly and is taking advantage of a KMT nomination blunder. After LY Speaker Wang Jin-pyng decided to run on the proportional list for this election and the KMT did not nominate a candidate from Wang's local network, the Taiwan Solidary Union (TSU) has lured parts of Wang's grassroots supporters to its side. The DPP is faring less well in those areas where the Pan-Blue overnominated in the last election, especially Kaohsiung City and Tainan County. It expects to lose 1-3 seats in these areas.

East Coast and the Rest: Still Going Blue

18. (C) The east coast counties and cities (9 seats), three outlying island chains (3 seats), and the aborigine island-wide districts (8 seats) have long been, and continue to be, the preserve of the Pan-Blue. Keelung City (3 seats), Hualien County (2 seats), and Taitung County (1 seat) are very predictable races with the Pan-Blue maintaining its 2-1, 1-1, and 1-0 advantage. Ilan County (3 seats, down 1 from the last election), is the only place where the DPP can increase its lead over the Pan-Blue by coming out with a 2-1 advantage. The single-seat island districts will go to the KMT (Kinmen district), PFP (Lienchiang), and former KMT independent (Penghu). Despite its efforts to lobby aborigine groups, the DPP has made little headway in penetrating grassroots organizations and has only one secure aborigine seat out of the 8, an increase of one over its previous zero baseline.

Comment: Will the Trend Continue?

19. (C) Occupying the executive seat of government since 2000, the DPP has poured resources into the northern, Hakka, and central districts in the hopes of expanding its own support and weaning local interests away from the remnants of the KMT's organizational base. Those efforts began to bear fruit in the 2004 presidential election, will likely translate into

marked gains in the LY, and could continue in next year's mayor and county magistrate elections. AIT has already begun to see some Pan-Blue county magistrates in these districts taking a more circumspect role in the local LY races with an eye toward their own re-election campaign next year. These critical local leaders want to retain, even increase, their county's access to central largesse and to avoid alienating centrist and light green voters they will need in 2005. The recent defection of Taitung County magistrate from the PFP to the DPP and the rumors that the Hsinchu County magistrate will also shift loyalties after the LY election suggest Pan-Blue strongholds will be coming under increasing pressure.

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